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# Effects of a mindfulness intervention for student teachers on depressive symptoms, affect and emotion regulation

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## Introduction

Educator stress and burnout are not only the cause for negative health consequences in teachers (Bauer et al. 2007; Bellingrath et al. 2009), they also impact negatively on educational performance and thus diminish future prospects and learning behavior of students (Klusmann et al. 2008). Therefore, it should be an important element in the education of young teachers, to increase self-regulatory capacities to manage job-related stress. Mindfulness training, which aims to increase the ability to “pay attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145), has been shown to successfully improve health and well-being in clinical as well as workplace settings (Kuyken et al. 2016; Hülsheger et al. 2013). The implementation of mindfulness training in the university context could support the development of adequate stress-management strategies early on and support a successful career start.

## Study Question

The present study therefore investigated the effects of a university-based mindfulness intervention for teacher students on affect and emotion regulation.

## Methods

A mindfulness based stress reduction course based on the approach of Kabat-Zinn (2003) was adapted to fit the context of a university seminar. Teacher students received biweekly mindfulness classes and were instructed to practice daily meditation exercises (bodyscan and sitting meditation). To identify effects specific to the mindfulness training an active control group received a phenomenologically oriented training of awareness, where participants mainly reflected on their own phenomenal consciousness by asking themselves questions such as “Am I conscious now?”

group	t1	treatment over 1 semester	t2
mindfulness group (n=104)	pretest	mindfulness training, incl. sitting meditation, body scan	posttest
active controls (n=48)	pretest	phenomenological awareness training	posttest
passive controls (n=33)	pretest	-	posttest

**Participants:** 180 university students (age: mean=24.92, SD=3.53; gender: 38.33% male)

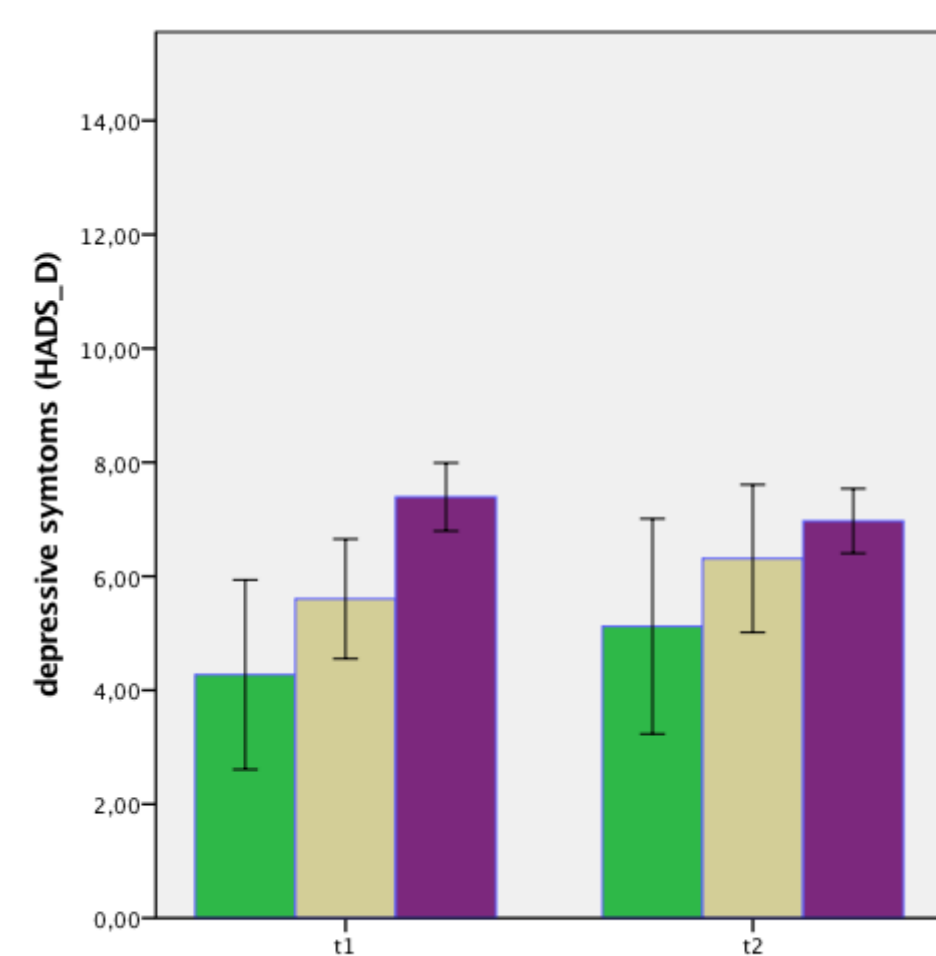
**Dependent Measures:** Questionnaires measuring depressive affect, mood and emotion regulation

- Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS)
- Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)
- Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)

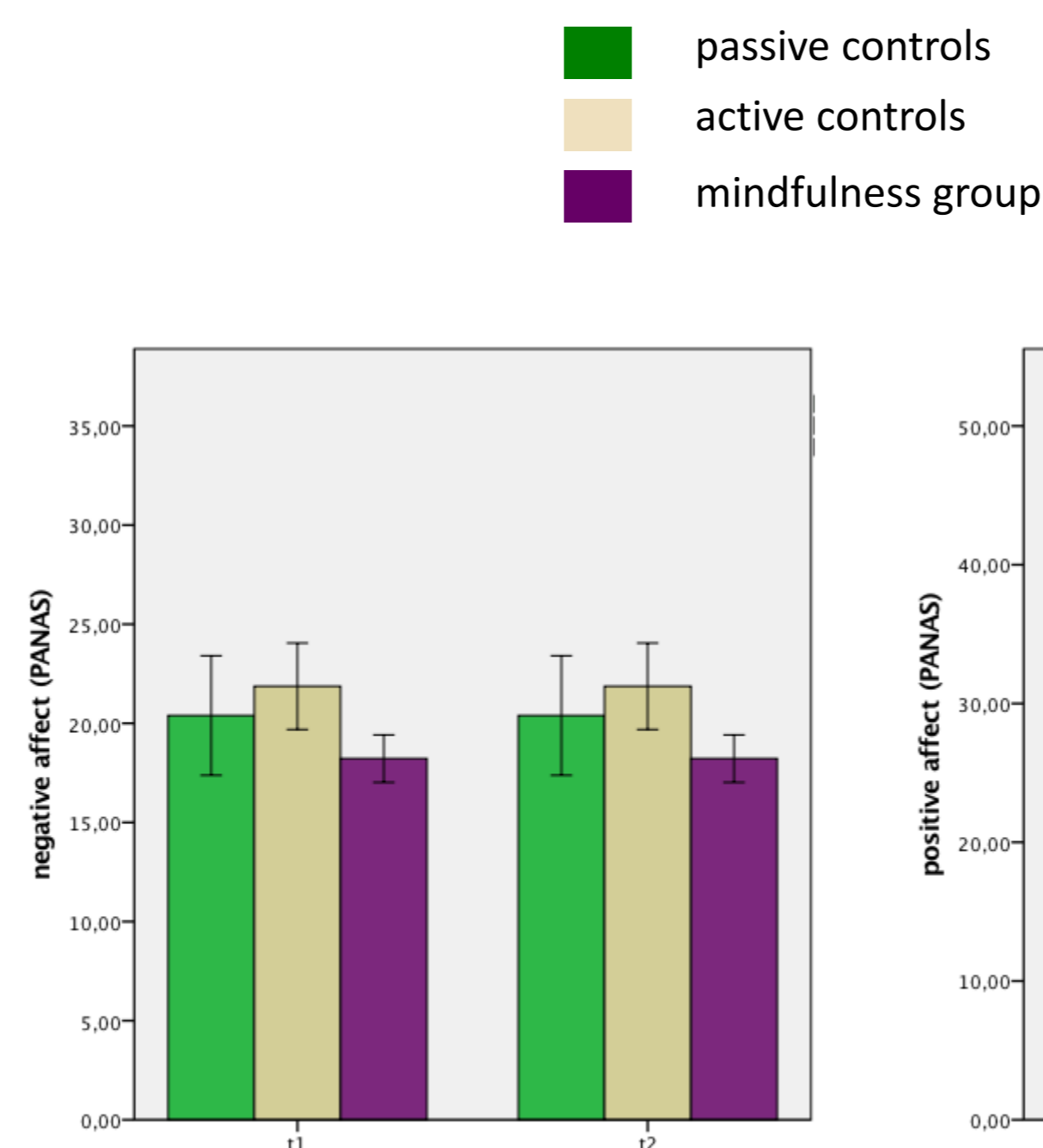
**Statistics:** Linear mixed-effects models, using R

- Contrasts: passive control vs. mindfulness training, passive control vs. active control
- Predictors: participant, participant gender, time of measurement (pre- vs. posttest), group, interaction time x group

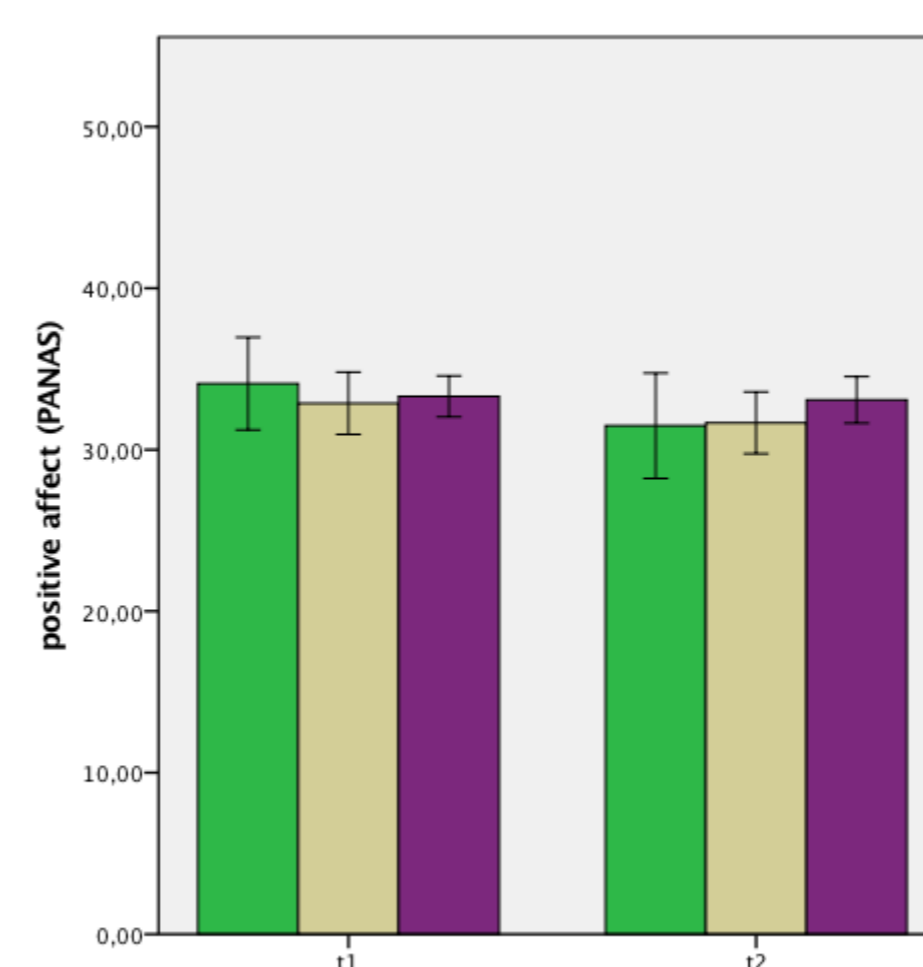
## Results



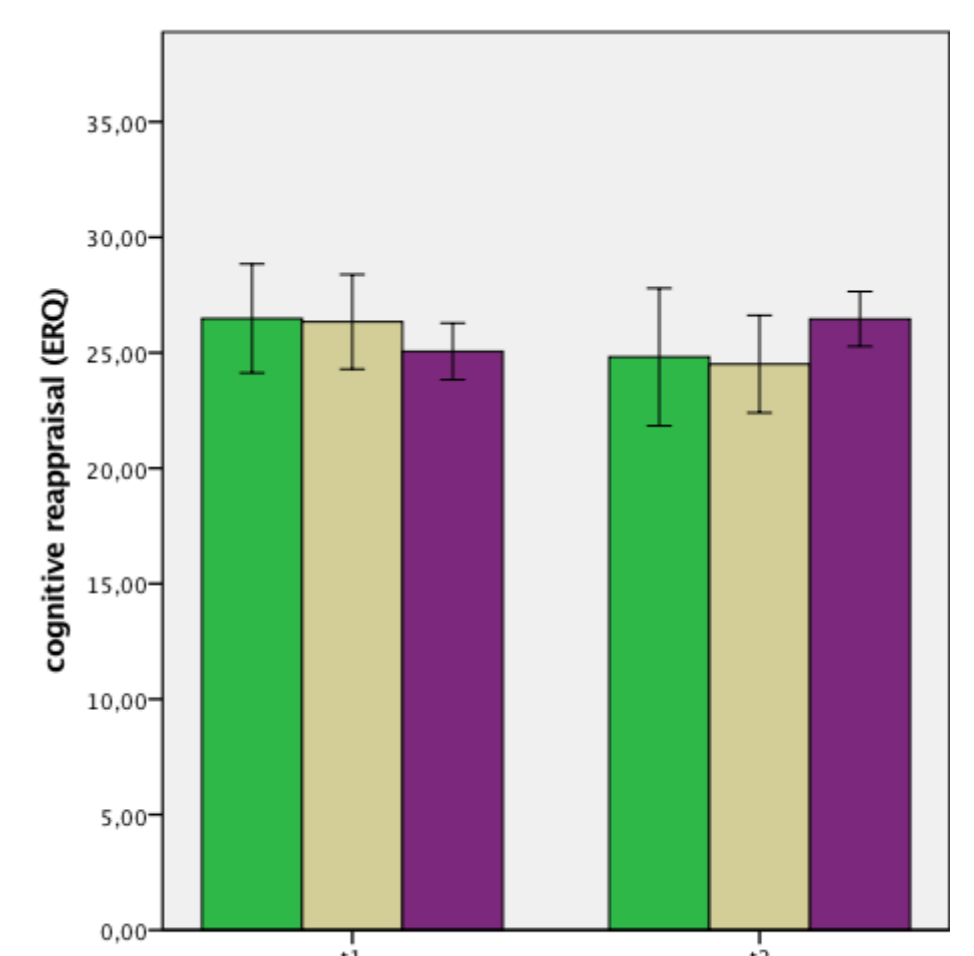
passive controls vs. mindfulness group:  
 $b = -0.61$ ,  $t_{(181)} = -3.08$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $r = .22$



passive controls vs. mindfulness group:  
 $b = -0.82$ ,  $t_{(181)} = -1.98$ ,  $p = .05$ ,  $r = .15$



passive controls vs. mindfulness group:  
 $b = 0.86$ ,  $t_{(181)} = 1.97$ ,  $p = .05$ ,  $r = .14$



passive controls vs. mindfulness group:  
 $b = 1.60$ ,  $t_{(180)} = 3.29$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $r = .24$   
passive controls vs. active controls:  
 $b = -1.68$ ,  $t_{(180)} = -2.03$ ,  $p = .04$ ,  $r = .15$

## Conclusions

- The present study showed positive effects of an MBSR-training in the university context on affect and emotion regulation.
- The mindfulness group showed a decrease in depressive symptomatology in response to the training.
- The mindfulness training helped students to stay positive, even when facing the pressure of the “end of term exams”.
- Students trained in mindfulness also engaged in healthier strategies to deal with difficult emotions, i.e. increased the use of cognitive reappraisal, which may become helpful during the transition into school placements, which is perceived as extremely challenging by many young teachers.

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